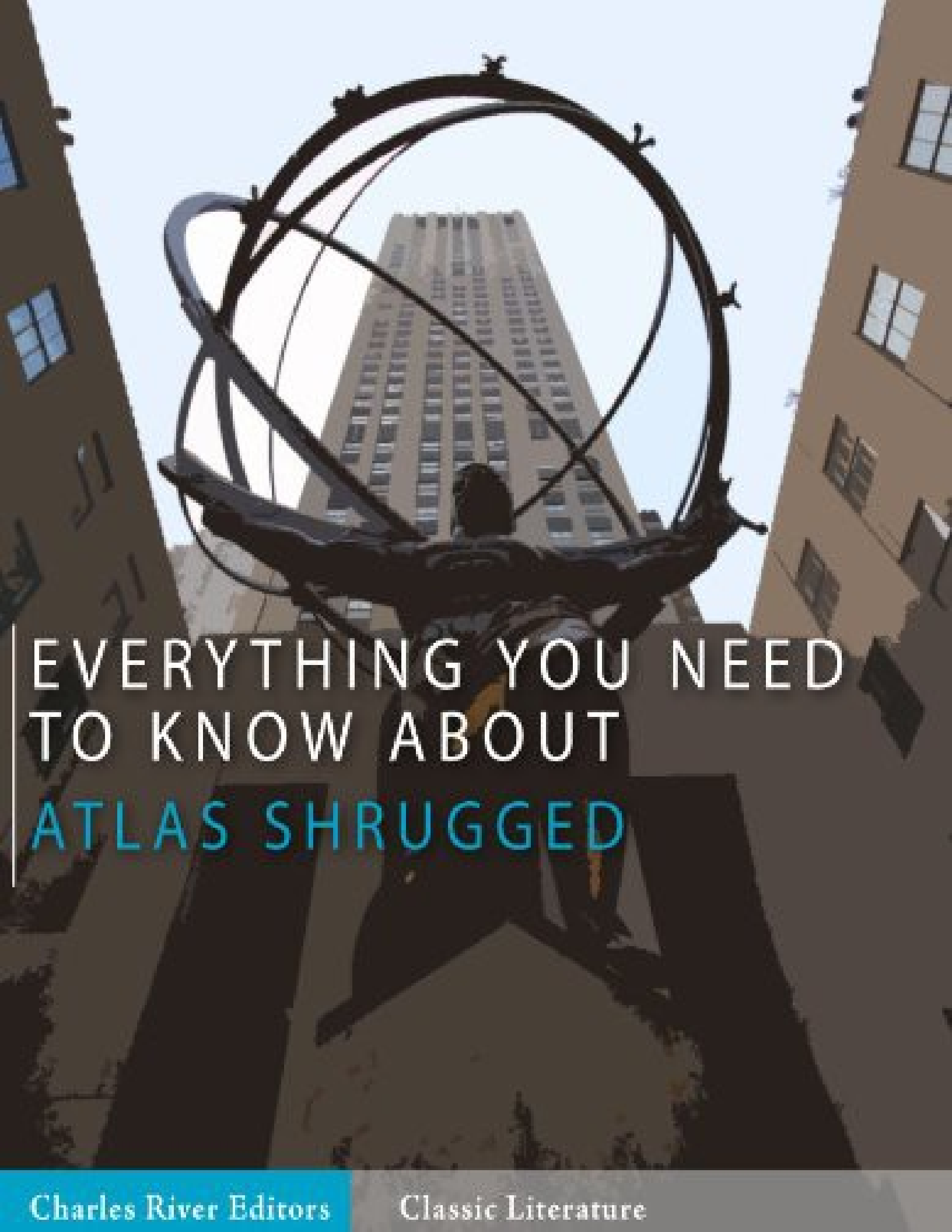

EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT ATLAS SHRUGGED

Charles River Editors

Classic Literature

Everything You Need to Know About *Atlas Shrugged*

About Charles River Editors

Charles River Editors was founded by Harvard and MIT alumni to provide superior editing, original writing, and admissions consulting services with the domain experience your project needs. The team includes management consultants, post-doctoral researchers, practicing engineers, practicing lawyers, and practicing physicians of numerous specialties. In addition to providing original digital content for third party publishers, Charles River Editors republishes civilization's greatest literary works, bringing them to a new generation via ebooks. Signup to receive updates about new books as we publish them, and visit charlesriverediters.com for more information.

Everything You Need to Know About *Atlas Shrugged*
About Charles River Editors
BACKGROUND
Plot
- Who is John Galt?
- Part One
- Part Two
- Part Three

Themes
- To Strike or Not to Strike
- Collectivism Comrades
- Power Brokers
- Live Free or Die

Symbols
- Dollar for Dollar
- A Bridge to Nowhere
- Music
- Other Symbols

Conclusion

Introduction

In 2009, with the global economy hemorrhaging jobs, and Western governments pouring hundreds of billions of dollars in taxpayer money to "bail out" troubled financial firms and large companies, frustrated people and political analysts turned to a book written over 50 years earlier as a guide out of the abyss.

Though *Atlas Shrugged* had been a popular title when Ayn Rand published it in 1957, it's quite possible that the only reference to it that many Americans heard before 2009 came from the hit series Mad Men. However, this staple of conservative and libertarian reader took on new life as the new Obama Administration sought to use government resources to fix financial problems.
Conservative commentators like Glenn Beck and Rush Limbaugh praised the book for their audiences, and Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas labeled it one of his favorite novels. By January 2009, one article in the Wall Street Journal was titled, ""Atlas Shrugged From Fiction to Fact in 52 Years".

In that time, the giant novel Rand considered her magnum opus has seen its sales spike dramatically, eventually reaching the top of Amazon's bestsellers list. Even today, it is still within Kindle's Top 500 titles, making it one of the most heavily read books of the last several years.

Today, many have heard of the title and are partially familiar with it, but the sheer size of the book makes it inaccessible for people who don't have a lot of time to read or ponder Rand's philosophy. Thankfully, that problem is now solved with *Everything You Need to Know About Atlas Shrugged*, a primer that can get anyone caught up to speed on the plot, characters, themes, symbols, and philosophy of Rand's classic in 30 minutes.

In addition to covering the book in detail, *Everything You Need to Know About Atlas Shrugged* includes a biography of Rand's life, discussion about

the inspiration for the novel’s characters, and a full-fledged explanation of Objectivism and the sources of Rand’s political philosophy.

With *Atlas Shrugged* and its underlying themes as relevant as ever today, get caught up quick with this resourceful guide.

Background

Atlas Shrugged, Ayn Rand's fourth and final novel was first published in 1957. It is considered by many to be the most influential novel read in America and perhaps may be second to the Bible as one of the most influential books put to paper. It is required reading in management training sessions within some companies, and a book given to new hires by politicians and CEOs across the land. Since the author's death in 1982, the book has enjoyed a revival with rising book sales, waiting lists in libraries, and even Hollywood movie production. One reason this may be is because her words explain in a more straightforward way the current economic catastrophes facing the nation than is publicly expressed by politicians and so called financial experts today. The timeless themes and symbols combine with a riveting plot to create a classic novel that serves as a handbook for human action and interaction.

Ayn Rand was born in St. Petersburg, Russia to Jewish parents on February 2, 1905 as Alisa Zinov'yevna Rosenbaum, and she lived through the turbulence and transformation of early 20th century Russia. Her first exposure to reading came after she taught herself how to read at age six, and she decided at nine years old to become a writer after a chance encounter with the books of Victor Hugo, the writer she admired most. She was witness to the Bolshevik Revolution and the ultimate Communist victory as a teenager. Nevertheless, during her last year of high school, she was introduced to the history of the United States and immediately decided to make America her model of what an ideal society should look like.

Rand's family lived fairly well until the confiscation of an old and longstanding family pharmacy business. Along with the rapid growth of mysticism and collectivism of Russian culture, and with the pogroms purging Jews, Rand's family lost its gentile life-style and endured great hardship. Rand's experience with the maelstrom of this revolutionary zeal and cultural breakdown greatly contributed toward the formation of Rand's philosophy of objectivism, individualism and anti-religious ideas.

Rand came to the United States as a young woman for a visit in 1925 and, as fate would have it, never returned to her birth land. She visited relatives in Chicago, and in 1926 she ventured to Hollywood, California to attempt to become a screenwriter. Cecil B. DeMille hired her on the spot when he saw her by the gates of his filming area, offering her a job to work on the set of *King of Kings*. A few years later she married actor Frank O'Connor, whom she had met during her first week at the DeMille studio. In spite of their many extramarital affairs, she and O'Connor were married for 50 years until his death.

Rand began writing *Atlas Shrugged*, her enormous three part major novel, each with ten chapters, in 1946. Nearly 10 years after it was begun she finished what ultimately became her greatest achievement, and she poignantly dramatized her unique philosophy. In fact, her philosophy of integrating ethics, metaphysics, epistemology, politics, economics, and sexuality came to be called Objectivism, or as she called it, "a philosophy for living on earth."

Generally, people who read Ayn Rand's philosophy and words either love or hate them. The heroes portrayed generally overcome great obstacles and it is they who move the world and carry it on their shoulders. Atlas, as the noun in the title of her novel implies, is the often-used Greek mythological figure that represents strength and who alone is able to hold the world upon his shoulders. He is at once cursed by the gods with his burden and made a hero for his eternal effort. By some accounts then, the raison d'etre of most of Rand's writing is reactionary. That is, it demonstrates her impulse to write and rail against the complex events she witnessed at a time of great world upheaval in a philosophical rather than an imaginary, strictly fictional way. *Atlas Shrugged* is more a study of Rand's observations on the nature of being human in real life. The novel is a study of those who have the ability to see, to make connections, and create what has not been created before, and a warning to those who cannot seem to do so. The use of made-up names of characters is purely fictional, but her philosophies and whom the characters might represent are not. Not many writers of her time period could produce novels of such intensity, since the world was indeed a difficult place to live in from 1900 to 1946.

Plot

Who is John Galt?

In addition to the enormous length of *Atlas Shrugged*, what makes Rand's seminal work so unique and complex are the labyrinth-like plots. The first major plot reveals to the reader the rising action, with a high point that culminates with a workers' strike that serves as a metaphor for a "strike" of the mind. Rand supplies readers with foreshadowing and indirect hints of the existence of this strike, all the while using sub-plots to keep the events of the major plot hidden so that the impending strike only reveals itself in a slow and retrospective way. These sub-plots include the actions of two main characters, Dagny Taggart and Hank Rearden, and their dual struggle to save their respective companies and industries through the John Galt Railroad Line, and Dagny's quest to find the inventor of a revolutionary new engine. As the major female character, Dagny also desires to stop and destroy those evil forces that are draining the brain trust of the world. Through the pursuit of all these elements, the main plot of the implementation of a "strike" both metaphorical and physical is revealed, and the epic-like heroes act out and solve the now famous and often used phrase, "Who is John Galt?"

Part One

A deeper study of a summary of the plot that begins in Part One portrays a United States that is suffering through an ever-worsening economic condition. Dagny Taggart, who is vice president in charge of her company's day to day operations, works hard to repair Taggart Transcontinental Railroad's dying Rio Norte Line that services Colorado, the last successful business area in the nation as depicted in the book. Her efforts are bogged down by the fact that many of the country's most talented entrepreneurs are retiring, while at the same time a number of them seem to be disappearing. The railroad's crisis worsens when the Mexican government nationalizes Taggart's Mexico-located San Sebastian Line. This particular railroad line had been built to provide transport and hauling to the worthless copper mills of Francisco d'Anconia in Mexico. A once successful industrialist and businessman, not to mention a paramour of Dagny's, d'Anconia has become a seemingly worthless and used up Lothario.

Regardless of the drama of what others are doing, the financial problems of Taggart's railroad need to be solved quickly, so Dagny's brother Jim uses his political clout and guile to press through legislation that destroys Taggart's only competition in Colorado. Dagny however, also must fix the Rio Norte Line immediately, so she plans to use a company called Rearden Metal Mills and its newly invented alloy to bolster her railroad's efficiency and push up its worth. The new alloy's creator and the owner of the mills is, of course, Hank Rearden.

Into the unfolding maze of the plot enters the State Science Institute that issues a denunciation of Rearden Metal and its new alloy, and therefore, along with the loss of credibility of the Metal Mills, the stock value of Taggart Transcontinental lines also crashes. Dagny immediately rolls her sleeves up and starts her own separate company to rebuild the line, and it is a resounding success. Dagny and Rearden team up then for both business and sexual pleasure. One day, while out frolicking, they discover an engine

in an abandoned factory that runs on static electricity, and they begin a search for the inventor.

To add to the heightening drama, the government passes further new laws that burden the already nearly defunct Colorado industries. Dagny's troubles with building up her company increase when Ellis Wyatt, an oil industrialist, disappears after setting fire to his wells. Dagny is forced to cut back on her trains that used to haul oil and the byproducts since Wyatt was such a big customer, and the situation worsens. As the tensions mount, more and more industrialists begin to disappear. Dagny truly believes that there is a destroyer or force at work that snatches men away when they are most needed. Quite on the spur of what appears to be a whim, d'Anconia visits Rearden and a discussion ensues as to why Rearden remains in business under such repressive conditions. When a fire breaks out and they work together to put it out, d'Anconia sees first hand and understands Rearden's love for his metal mills business.

Rearden goes on trial for breaking one of the many new laws but refuses to participate in the legal nonsense to convict him. Not wishing to be seen as thugs, the court lets Rearden walk. At this point in the novel, we see Rand expressing the concept of the importance of the role of perceptions in a society. How we *look* to others is often more important than what we do.

It is at this juncture that Rand introduces a new character, economic dictator Wesley Mouch, who becomes the chief villain and bad bureaucrat. We see in him all the characteristics of a man who creates chaos for the sake of chaos. Mouch initially teams up with Rearden to represent Rearden in Washington D.C. and later seeks his aid in implementing a new set of socialist laws. The "Preservation of Livelihood," and the "Equalization of Opportunity Law" are two of the many names of Mouch's socialist laws. Naive at first, Reardon eventually discovers Mouch's true nature, but by then it is too late to reverse the damage.

Meanwhile, Jim Taggart realizes the need for economic favors that will keep his ailing railroad running after the collapse of Colorado. Jim seizes the opportunity of using Lillian, Rearden's pathetic and jealous wife who wants to destroy her husband. She tells him that Rearden and Dagny are

having an affair, so Jim Taggart uses this information in a quid-quo-pro with the government people. At this point in the novel, Wesley Mouch has elevated himself into an economic czar and is yet again implementing a new set of laws. One of these new laws is called Directive 10-289, his most irrational and repressive law yet. It includes a ruling that requires all patents to be signed over to the government. In a final blow, Rearden is blackmailed into signing over his metal patent to protect Dagny's reputation.

Dagny is completely disgusted with the new rules and bureaucratic orders and retreats to a mountain hideaway. When she learns of a massive accident at the Taggart railroad tunnel, she is compelled to return to her job. She next receives a letter from the scientist she had hired earlier in the novel to help rebuild the found engine, and she fears he will be the next target of the "destroyer" that makes people disappear. In an attempt to stop the scientist from also disappearing, she follows him in an airplane and crashes in the mountains. When she wakes up, she finds herself in a remote valley called Galt's Gulch, where lo and behold, all the retired and thought to be missing industrialists are located.

Part Two

Part Two of the novel finds the characters drawn into a strike situation unlike what we are familiar with in every day parlance. It is what Rand considers the thesis idea of the novel, referring to it as a "strike of the mind." Dagny meets John Galt, who turns out to be both the destroyer and the man who built the engine. She falls in love with him, but the effort to give up her railroad is too much to ask of her, and she leaves the valley. When she returns to work, she finds that the government has nationalized the entire railroad industry. Government leaders including Mouch want her to make a speech reassuring the public about the goodness and usefulness of these new laws. She denies them vehemently until Lillian once again comes to blackmail her over Rearden and her love affair with him. Reluctantly agreeing to give the speech over the airwaves, Dagny somehow conjures up the strength to proudly announce her affair with Rearden and reveals that he has also been blackmailed. In strong terms, she warns the listeners about their repressive government.

In this part of the book the country is just about on the brink of collapse; politicians no longer even hide their pretense of working for the people's good. The country is a hair's breadth away from total destruction. The politicians and bureaucrats' vast network of influence peddling and corruption creates worse chaos. For example, at one point crops are rotting while farmers wait for freight trains that are diverted for personal favors. In an attempt to gain control of the situation, the government stages a riot at Rearden Metal Mills, but the steelworkers organize and fight back, led by the erstwhile d'Anconia, who has been working undercover at the metal mills all along. D'Anconia saves Rearden's life during a fire and then convinces him to join the strike and work behind the scenes from a hiding place in Galt's Gulch valley that Dagny begins to call Atlantis.

Part Three

Part Three of the book contains within it the main crux of Rand's philosophy spoken by the character of John Galt. Just as the head of state prepares to give a speech on the economic situation of the country, John Galt takes over the airwaves and delivers his own lengthy address to the people of the United States, laying out the terms of the strike he and the others on his side have organized. In a last ditch effort to save their own necks the government leaders seek Galt to make him their economic dictator in place of Mouch. However, Dagny inadvertently leads them to him, and they take him prisoner. Galt refuses to help them, even after he is tortured by Mouch and his henchmen. Finally, Dagny and the strikers rescue him in an armed confrontation with guards. They return to the valley where Dagny finally joins the strikers. Soon, the country's collapse is complete and the strikers prepare to return to weigh in with their ideas and policies.

Themes

To Strike or Not to Strike

One of the primary themes in the novel is the concept of having the ability or right of workers to strike. In fact, the original working title for the novel was called *The Strike*, until Rand's husband suggested "Atlas Shrugged". To understand the meaning of striking from her point of view, we must reduce the theme to its absolute dual essence by using the phrase, "strike of the mind" *and* freedom to strike, as in workers striking.

Hundreds if not thousands of people have been inspired by Ayn Rand's book *Atlas Shrugged* and have taken chances by founding their own businesses, pursuing careers that were filled with challenges, entering into relationships their parents might have opposed, or left marriages they knew were destructive. Some people even have taken business leaps and personal journeys that may have terrified them before. This "strike of the mind" or saying that "I'm not going to take it anymore", which was led by the character of John Galt in the novel, demonstrates this quintessential theme.

Best expressed by striking workers, the theme is exemplified when the best creative minds are systematically removed from the world, or a country for that matter, and thus their importance leaves a vacuum in society. Without the great thinkers, inventors and producers, humanity, according to Rand, generally spirals quickly downward. The economy collapses, and irrational striking workers quickly become looters and grab power for themselves. Rand's belief in the central importance of the mind is never lost on the reader. The reader may understand, while not always agreeing with, the often-held notion that labor is the sole propeller of prosperity. As the events of the novel attempt to show, only the mind enables creation and innovation and thus powers the engine of the world. Rand will insist that labor alone cannot achieve productivity and prosperity without the guidance of the mind. Otherwise we all become looters.

Collectivism Comrades

A secondary, but also large theme that looms throughout the novel is the notion that collectivism, or socialism as it is generally referred to, may be the root of the evils of society. Collectivism is often defined as the "personal or social orientation that emphasizes the good of the group, community, or society over and above individual gain." Rand sets out to demonstrate through the novel's action what happens when governments follow socialist ideas. She argues that this fake and forced moral code of collectivism/socialism that places the needs of one's neighbors above one's own rational self-interest is the cause of chaos and evil. Incentive is destroyed, and corruption becomes inevitable. Rand's idea of greed being good is at the heart of this theme.

The example within the novel of the Twentieth Century Motor Company illustrates this collectivistic approach simply and cleverly. The Twentieth Century Motor Company of Starnesville, Wisconsin is a fictional business firm in the book. Specifically, this company built vehicle engines for more than twenty years until finally it went bankrupt and was liquidated. Subsequently, the original workforce, having noticed that the decay in the economy of the entire United States dated from their original vote for a disastrous collectivistic type business plan, came up with an expression in the form of a question that expressed not only their hopelessness but their despair. That coined epithetic question was, "Who is John Galt?"

After the plant adopted a method in which workers were paid according to phony needs and ordered to work based on zero ability not even close to mediocrity, the workers became full of themselves, each seeking to show himself or herself as most needy and least skilled. The plant failed, and the community was destroyed by the lack of anything substantial and accountable. For Rand, any business, economic, or political plan based on sacrifice of the individual for the group will always lead to chaos and destruction.

As individuals, Rand's heroes will reject any demand for self-sacrifice. The novel is the story of a strike by "the men of the mind," the producers,

thinkers, and achievers. They protest the idea that they have to serve others and that the greater their ability, the greater the debt they owe. Those who joined the strike swore an oath, on their life and their love of it, that they would not live for the sake of others nor ask others to live for them. As John Galt's states, "I swear by my life and my love of it that I will never live for the sake of another man, nor ask another man to live for mine." Ayn Rand understood that thought, choice, and actions are of the individual kind and should not be products of the collective group. Her heroic characters think for themselves, as Taggart, Rearden, and John Galt do.

Objectivism vs. Literary Art

When the book was published, it sold very well and was on the bestseller list. However, Rand and her friends had hoped the novel's main concept of man "as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute" did not materialize and also did not affect the intellectuals and academia whom she thought would run with it and produce the cultural changes she was longing for. Indeed, the book was considered brilliant but it did not set the world on fire. Objectivism as a theme was difficult to understand, and the average reader simply wanted to read the novel as a work of literary art and not as a philosophical and complex justification for living life.

Ayn Rand was once asked if she could present the essence of Objectivism "while standing on one foot." Her answer was:

1. *Metaphysics*: Objective Reality
2. *Epistemology*: Reason
3. *Ethics*: Self-interest
4. *Politics*: Capitalism

She then translated those terms into familiar and understandable language:

1. "Nature, to be commanded, must be obeyed."

2. “You can’t eat your cake and have it too.”
3. “Man is an end in himself.”
4. “Give me liberty or give me death.”

Even with “one foot on the ground,” Objectivism is Rand’s philosophical explanation of how to live. It demonstrates that philosophy is essential in each person’s life, and how those who do not think philosophically are the helpless victims of the ideas they passively accept from others.

The beliefs of Objectivism, as outlined by John Galt, in his three-hour radio address toward the denouement of the novel, can be expressed as seven major ideas of becoming a rational being according to Galt. We note that this may be a Rand-inspired corollary reference to the Seven Deadly Sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony - many of these seven sins Objectivists see as virtues. Galt states, “Our seven guiding principles are Rationality, Independence, Integrity, Honesty, Justice, Productiveness, and Pride.” All of Galt’s principles are united against a common enemy: the practice of "blanking-out." "Blanking-out" for Galt refers to ignoring reality and people's true characters, ignoring your own happiness and desires, fairness, and personal responsibility.

Galt wants people to face life head-on in order to lead a moral life. Ignoring and pretending are immoral. Doing things against the individual is also immoral for his character. This is why he condemns both “Mystics”, people who rely on superstition, religion, and the idea that people are inherently "sinful”, and "Materialists", people who prize society over the individual. Objectivism opposes doctrines of Christianity specifically and religion of any kind generally, and especially the idea of Original Sin, which says that since Adam and Eve were tempted and banished from Eden, all humans are born with sin. Rand of course is more atheistic in attitude, and felt that man is an end in himself and had no need of religion. To sum up her views on religion - “That which you call your soul or spirit is your consciousness, and that which you call ‘free will’ is your mind’s freedom to think or not, the only will you have, your only freedom, this is the choice that controls all the choices you make and determines your life

and character." Thus Objectivism via Rand rejects any form of determinism, the belief that man is a victim of forces beyond his control, such as God, fate, upbringing, genes, or even economic conditions.

Although portrayed as epic heroes, the Galt types of Objectivists also dislike the notion that people are "heroic." Heroism means sacrificing for someone or to something. They would also oppose Communism since it is a system of government that favors society over the individual. This is why Galt praises American democracy and capitalism in his speech; he claims that these are systems that favor individuals. Galt also expressed some other concepts Objectivism opposed, such as people who separate their minds from their bodies; the two should be united in harmony. Objectivism also opposes sacrifice and charity, or doing things for people based on their "need." According to Galt, people should trade for what they need, not take it. In the book we see consequences of sacrifice and need colliding with the actions of the looters. In the novel Galt intrepidly removed his fellow Objectivists and their positive values from the world and takes them to a place referred to as Atlantis, so that the world would see how misguided it is without them.

Today, it seems that more readers are able to comprehend and find the philosophical core of *Atlas Shrugged* more readily. It is a theme coupled with its resounding defense of capitalism. Objectivism as Rand lays it out, is a worldview that human life can be understood in terms of survival, glorification of production, and value of the self rather than sacrifice. It is a view that individuals are the Atlases who carry the world on their shoulders; that the individual has the moral right to live for himself and to pursue his own happiness with reason as his guidepost.

Power Brokers

A fourth theme that rings loudly and ranks high alongside the theme of collectivism is the theme of power. The world the characters are experiencing seems to be collapsing, yet no one is doing much about it. Many examples of people who seem not to care, choose not to use their power, or use it ineffectively are portrayed nearly as much as the wicked characters of the likes of villain Mouch, the economic dictator. From the defeated residents of Starnesville where the Twentieth Century Motor Company is based, to the frightened and useless looters, nobody seems able or willing to act to avoid catastrophe. And the thinkers, those movers and shakers who could swoop in to save the day, are on “the strike of the mind.”

The theme of power isn't just about perceived physicalness of kinetic types of power. The "looters" are obsessed with having and using a raw kind of power, but it is power based on terror and fear, and used in the service of destruction and anarchy. Conversely, Galt and his brand of strikers have the power of resistance and of knowledge, and the power to reveal the looters for what they really are. The looters represent the counter-culture, the embracing of expressions that are of a class interest. Reason, objectivity, and standards are not part of their vocabulary. The looters exist for the sake of only taking and they have the power, written with a small letter “p” to make others believe things, to influence how they think and behave. This is the kind of vapid power the impotent looters have, and this is the kind of power that Galt and his strikers wage their philosophical war against. It doesn’t take much to visualize Ayn Rand looking back over her shoulder at the Russian Revolution.

Live Free or Die

One of Rand's major arguments via a fifth perceived theme in *Atlas Shrugged* is that the *freedom* within American society is responsible for its greatest achievements. For example, America is still considered to this day the place where people have the freedom to be innovative, original, and one of a kind - in other words the freedom to be an individual with thoughts, ideas, and the opportunity to do whatever it takes to create the American Dream. Since the birth of the nation, this appeal of freedom has been the driving force for the development of nearly all things made in America. Renowned "rags to riches" author Horatio Alger, Jr. wrote dozens of tales about individuals overcoming adversity through unyielding perseverance and basic moral principles, and his stories captivated the public in the late 19th century. Rand used some of his concepts to move her characters and story forward, attempting to demonstrate the simple but powerful beliefs that hard work, honesty, and determination can conquer all obstacles and that anyone can avail themselves of the American free enterprise system. Thus, the vision of the American Dream is accessible, and a version of one's own is available if one works hard enough. John Galt preached it, and Ayn Rand believed in it wholeheartedly.

Ayn Rand thoroughly researched the history of capitalism to prove the themes she would write about in *Atlas Shrugged*. She was well aware of the progress made during this period of personal and economic freedom. Within that history were role models and creators who built upon the works of others to make great technological advances. Samuel Morse invented the telegraph, a device later improved on by Thomas Edison, who went on to invent the phonograph, the electric light, and the motion picture projector. Henry Ford revolutionized the transportation industry by creating mass-production automobiles, while the Wright Brothers created an airplane. Railroad magnates like Cornelius Vanderbilt and James J. Hill established inexpensive modes of transportation and opened up the Pacific Northwest and other areas of the country to social and economic development.

Many other men became tycoons of industry during this time period, with names that still ring out not only among history professors but on office buildings and products, like Bell, Goodyear, Eastman-Kodak, and Westinghouse. Men named Carnegie and Rockefeller left their legacies via endowments. These are a few examples from a long list of people whose advances and forward thinking in the late 19th century affected all Americans, including Ayn Rand, who claimed that economic freedom and social freedom propelled these creative men to achieve their desires and gave them the environment in which to create their achievements. The question one is left with and forced to ask is not only 'who is John Galt,' but what will happen when he is no longer there.

Atlas Shrugged also provides Ayn Rand's answer to our question of what would happen if this freedom were lost. In her futuristic way, she projects America's mid-20th century socialist trend and loss of freedom on a huge Hollywood-like big screen. The United States portrayed in the story has significant control over the domestic economy, while at the same time in the story the rest of the globe has been swallowed up by communist "Peoples' States" and human beings live in deep poverty. A limited degree of economic freedom still exists in the America of the novel, but it is inexorably eroding. The successful are heavily taxed to support the poor, and the American poor are similarly levied to finance the even poorer people in the foreign "Peoples' States." The government subsidizes inefficient businesses at the expense of the more efficient. With the state controlling large portions of the economy, one result is the rise of crooked businessmen who seek profits by manipulating corrupt politicians rather than by doing good business. The government forces devious regulations on inventors to give up their patents so that all manufacturers may benefit equally from new products. Similarly, the government breaks up productive companies, compelling them to share the market with ineffective and weak competitors.

Essentially, the fictionalized universe of *Atlas Shrugged* presents a future in which the United States' trend toward socialism has been brilliantly and literarily sped up. Policies consisting of burdensome taxes, massive social welfare programs, tight governmental regulation of industry, and antitrust

threats against successful companies are built up in this make-believe universe of characters and situations that is recognizable by the reader since it is a story that has been often told through the ages. In this attempt to create a level playing field, freedom is steadily eroded. The United States of the novel — the last bulwark of liberty on earth — rapidly becomes a fascist/communist dictatorship.

The result, in Rand's fictional world, is a collapse of this American Dream and a withdrawal from society of the most independent minds - those thinkers and inventors and movers and shakers of industry. These good minds are chained down by government policies, and their innovations are either rejected or stolen by the state. Thinkers lack the freedom necessary to create new products, to start their own companies, to compete openly, and to earn wealth. Under the increasing yoke of tyranny what else is there left for them to do but prove their point through anarchy?

Symbols

Dollar for Dollar

The symbol of the strikers in the novel is the dollar sign. Everything in the strikers' world is stamped with it, including their cigarettes. Even the town square has a huge dollar sign erected in the center. This symbol represents everything that the workers are striking for, such as pride in work, the beauty of a final product, and the ability and competency of a creative mind at work. D'Anconia gives a speech to the strikers and says, "To trade by means of money is the code of the men of good will." Interestingly, the dollar is so highly valued by them that they create their own mint in Galt's Gulch and use only gold as a means and standard of exchange. The looters see the dollar as everything negative, while the strikers see it as the end all of their efforts. As Rand often was heard saying, "Greed is good."

A Bridge to Nowhere

The symbol of a bridge is used at the beginning of the novel. Taggart Railroad is attempting to improve on a bridge designed by Dagny's grandfather, Nate Taggart by which Taggart's railroad would not only expedite their rail line's shipping ability, but would also link the eastern and western part of the country via one single transcontinental line. Using a stronger alloy invented and produced by Rearden's Metal Mills to shore up the rail lines, which is also used by John Galt on his own railroad, we see a culmination of both Taggart and Rearden's ingenuity. The destruction of the bridge overpass symbolizes that the efforts of a creative mind, persistence, and ingenuity are no longer valued or deemed important by a society that is also self-destructing.

Music

The symbol of music also threads its way throughout the novel, beginning with the symphony Dagny Taggart is listening to in this excerpt from the very first chapter:

> "She thought dimly that there had been premonitory echoes of this theme in all of Richard Halley's work, through all the years of his long struggle, to the day, in his middle-age, when fame struck him suddenly and knocked him out. This—she thought, listening to the symphony—had been the goal of his struggle. She remembered half-hinted attempts in his music, phrases that promised it, broken bits of melody that started but never quite reached it; when Richard Halley wrote this, he . . . She sat up straight. *When* did Richard Halley write this?"

Other Symbols

There are also ideas of love and sex manipulated through the use of a variety of literary devices, as well as the many symbols and motifs of education, strength, and even the idea of a bracelet made of the alloy invented by Rearden that his wife Lillian scoffs at.

Conclusion

At the end of the day, the principles that are dramatized for us as readers in this lengthy plot filled with symbols and devices lead readers to an understanding of the philosophy of Ayn Rand herself. She is telling readers that there is a morality to life and death, that there is a code by which we should live, and that acting by these morals and codes will allow us to be, or to become, a better and more rational human being.

Atlas Shrugged portrayed a world of terrifying disfunctionality by a government bent on management and manipulation of nearly everything. It is no accident that Rand begins her thousand page novel with the line…"Who is John Galt?" She seems to have collected a sampling of John Galts from her real and everyday life. Rand held infamous Saturday evening gatherings in her apartment in New York during the '60s and '70s, hosting the likes of Alan Greenspan, Nathaniel Branden, and Leonard Peikoff. Apart from sparse appearances later on television, towards the end of her life she was preparing a mini-series of *Atlas Shrugged* and completing a speech for her annual forum lecture at Ford Hall in Boston. However, Rand succumbed to lung cancer on March 6, 1982. Her body was lain out in a funeral home in New York beside a six-foot floral dollar sign. The graveside service in Valhalla, New York consisted of nothing else but the reading of the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling. John Galt, also known as Ayn Rand, finally shrugged.

This file was downloaded from Z-Library project

Your gateway to knowledge and culture. Accessible for everyone.

z-library.sk z-lib.gs z-lib.fm go-to-library.sk

Official Telegram channel

Z-Access

https://wikipedia.org/wiki/Z-Library